

**The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)**  
**Quarterly stakeholder update**  
**Q4, 2023/24**



The Independent Custody Visiting Association represents all independent custody visiting schemes across the UK. Local volunteers (known as independent custody visitors or ICVs) make unannounced visits to police custody to check on the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of detainees and the condition of custody.

Each quarter, we ask schemes to report data on the number of visits, but also that they include detail of positive news from custody, causes of concern and areas where ICVs have had impact. This allows ICVA to pull together this stakeholder update, including areas which particularly stand out for comment/interest, or areas which are reported by multiple members.

**The state of custody**

Positively, schemes reported:

- Several schemes commented on improvements to custody decoration and information, with one reporting inclusion of pictorial images being placed around custody to make it less austere, the use of black board paint and giving detainees chalk to write/draw and information on custody and processes being included on iPads and posters for detainees.
- There is an increase of reports of distraction items more generally being offered to detainees, including foam footballs, increased stocks of reading materials, Koestler Arts in cell worksheets.
- The menopause referral pathway is reported as bedding in in several areas, with schemes noting improved underwear and towels to enhance detainee dignity, menopause packs for detainees including a wide range of items, and training disseminated to staff to ensure they are aware of arrangements for those in custody experiencing symptoms of the perimenopause/menopause.
- This quarter ICVA received some good examples of individualised care for detainees, including a detainee who required specific medical care being placed on constant supervision, with their treatment and effective access to healthcare. Another example included working with a detainee to protect their dignity so that ICVs could undertake a visit, and a further report of staff engaging patiently and kindly to deescalate a detainee's self-harming. Further examples involved attaining food from a local supermarket for a detainee with allergies, attaining an important prescription for a detainee and supporting anxious detainees in their first time in custody.
- ICVA consistently receives reports of schemes and custody working with partners in mental health, substance misuse and children's services to assist detainees in custody, and on release.

Causes for concern reported by schemes included:

- Staffing remains a concern for many monitors and schemes, with one area ICVs making a note of staffing levels on every visit to feedback to the OPCC.

- At times linked to the above, but also linked to the number of detainees in the suite, delays have been reported in ICVs gaining access to custody in some areas and awareness of custody staff of the role of the ICV and confidentiality of visits.
- One scheme reported ICV concerns there have been cases of handcuffing children and vulnerable adults awaiting AA for a strip search to take place. ICVs recorded concerns that detainees are being handcuffed for extended periods of time in custody.
- Several reports contain details of detainees not being fully aware of their rights and entitlements including being asked if they had caring responsibilities and being unaware of rights in terms of legal advice and an AA.
- Some reports regarding concerns with AAs attending custody 'only for interview' and under identification of vulnerability from custody staff, where ICVs felt that the detainee would benefit from an AA and in one case, mental health support.
- A range of estates issues were reported and have been escalated locally for remedial action.

### **The impact of ICVs**

ICVs have reported making a difference in several ways, some of which are:

- Schemes have reported ICVs making improvements in the way religious items are stored as per the ICVA briefing, ensuring that all texts are stored respectfully.
- ICVs reporting issues with the way in which they were introduced to detainees was raised as potentially impacting on uptake of visits, the scheme manager raised this with ICVA, and we have produced a guidance document for schemes to refer to. The scheme manager has also produced quick briefing notes for custody staff in their area.
- An ICV in one area suggested that custody have headphones for neurodivergent detainees with the result that the force have ordered some.
- Schemes have noticed a marked increase in the offering of distraction items as a positive example of how monitoring can make change in custody.

### **ICVA response**

*"There has been a gratifying number of areas of good practice reported this quarter, with some excellent examples of individual care for detainees including children, those experiencing anxiety and those with specific health requirements which is to be applauded.*

*As with most other quarterly updates, staffing continues to be an issue which we continue to raise with stakeholders. Other reported concerns which ICVA is following up on include the handcuffing of child and vulnerable adult detainees awaiting an AA prior to strip searches taking place.*

*ICVs are having an impact in a number of areas, including on the increased offering of distraction items as a result of their monitoring, effectively challenging the*

*'request' culture that can sometimes be seen in custody as noted in the United Nations Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture report in 2019.'*

*Sherry Ralph, Chief Executive Officer, ICVA.*

**Further information**

ICV schemes conducted at least 1,853 visits in Q3, interviewing at least 5, 807 detainees.

If you have any comments or questions about this report, please get in touch via the email address below.

info@icva.org.uk

ICVA leads, supports and represents local independent custody visiting schemes. Further information can be found on our website: [www.icva.org.uk](http://www.icva.org.uk)